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ABSTRACT

The major portion of this presentation describes research results and policy implications of the Family Matters Project, a longitudinal study of social contexts as they affect children and families during the period of transition from home to school. Also provided in this portion are highlights of what was learned from delivering to 160 families (varying in ethnicity, income level, and family structure) a parental empowerment program involving home visiting and neighborhood cluster building. The remaining part of the paper describes participating families' feelings about conditions since the 1980 Presidential election and traces present and anticipated developments in the Family Matters Program. Reported results focus on mothers' perceptions of their children, stresses on working parents, the influence of social networks on the lives of parents and children, the neighborhood as a context for childrearing, and the transition of the child from home to school. Policy recommendations center on changing the workplace to reduce stresses on parents, the importance of opportunities for parents to make friends, and ways of neutralizing constraining forces of neighborhoods while mobilizing their enabling forces. In addition, a new philosophy for the provision of support to families, growing out of the Family Matters Project, is described. Throughout the presentation, effects of income on families are emphasized. (RH)

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Family Matters Update: Design, Baseline Findings, Policy Implications and Program Developments from a Family Supports Study*

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Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to bring you up to date on the recent happenings in the Family Matters Project. Let me begin with a little bit of history, so that I can be sure that everyone has a general idea of the origins of Family Matters, and what has transpired since 1976, when we began.

Family Matters was designed by Professors Urie Bronfenbrenner, Bill Cross and myself to study "the capacity of urban American environments, to serve as support systems to parents and other adults directly involved in the care, upbringing and education of young children." We undertook to carry out such a study in a number of ways:

1) We became involved with 275 families here in Syracuse drawn from 18 neighborhoods and each with a 3-year-old child.
   One-third of those families was Black, one third contained a single parent, and the sample was composed of a variety of ethnic groups and a wide range of income levels.
2) We introduced a modest program of family supports to 160 of the families, which consisted of Home Visiting and neighborhood cluster-building within a parental empowerment context, about which I shall have more to say later on.
3) The undertaking has also involved research teams from 4 other countries; Sweden, West Germany, Israel, and Wales. Through common work with investigators in these countries, we are achieving cultural contrast and learning how much of what we are is the product of our own cultural values and traditions.
   In the five countries we have been working with a common set of interviews to gather information about the activities taking place inside families, the relationships

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of parents with relatives, neighbors and friends, and family involvement with major forces in the world outside family--the neighborhood, the workplace, schools, social services, and so on.

Thus far the sequence of events in the Project has been as follows:

1976-78 Developed and tested interviews

1978-79 Gathered baseline data

1979-81 Ran Family Matters Program, analyzed baseline data

1981-82 Gathered follow-up data

1982-83 Analyzing follow-up data

We are currently in the process of coding follow-up data gathered from 225 of the original 275 families. Analyses will begin soon, continue through spring, to be written up in summer.

Think of the truck loads of information gathered since 1977! I am reminded of a cartoon recently described to me by our own Frank Woolever. An older man is sitting in the livingroom surrounded by stacks and stacks of magazines. The piles are all on the tables, covering the couch, and filling every corner of the room. The man's wife is standing in doorway saying to him, "Dammit, Elmer, either learn to read or cancel the subscription!!!" Well, we have now cancelled the subscription on data collection, and we're learning to read what we have, but it's slow work.

I'd like to do four things in this presentation:

1) talk about research results, primarily from baseline analysis, but to some extent from follow-up as well, placed in policy perspective;
2) highlight what was learned from delivering the Family Matters Program;
3) share with you families' feelings about the effects on their family from changes in Washington since the 1980 Presidential election; and

4) describe for you exciting developments in the Family Matters Program since leaving Syracuse.

Some Research Findings, and Policy Implications

In presenting research findings, I will proceed as follows; first I will outline a set of findings in a particular area of interest to us, and then I will indicate some of the policy directions which I feel are implied by those findings. My policy orientation will be largely local, emphasizing actions which could be taken by the public and private sectors at the community level.

Let's begin with the world of work. We were interested in how mothers and fathers in different kinds of work situations outside the home viewed their children. Our assumption is that how positively parents view their children effects what they do with their children; the activities they do together, the disciplinary approaches they use. We distinguished between mothers working full-time outside the home, those employed part-time, and those at home full-time with their children. The results that I am reporting about work this morning come from our sample of 152 white, married mothers.

It turns out that mothers' perceptions depended to a large extent upon whether the child was a girl or a boy. To quote from one of our recent reports,

> Boys are viewed most positively by mothers who work part-time. In contrast, mothers working full-time portray their sons least favorably. When we look at daughters, it is working mothers, whether employed full or part-time, who express the more positive view. More lukewarm descriptions of girls are given by women who do not work outside the home.

This basic pattern is true both for women with a high school education and for those with education beyond high school, but the pattern gets stronger as the mothers become more educated.

One thing which surprised us about the working arrangements in our two-parent families was how many of them were involved in shift work. In more than a third of the

families where both parents worked, they worked in non-overlapping shifts. This choice was made in part so that the parents could both be employed and provide their own child care. As one mother put it,

> I want to be responsible for my children, to be the one who gives them their values and ideals. And their father, of course, is the other one who feels the same way I do and will take good care of them.

While there is some advantage to being able to provide one's own child care, there are also major disadvantages to working non-overlapping shifts. The biggest disadvantage is that the two parents rarely have opportunity to spend time with each other. This proved to be a major stress in the lives of these families, which was especially intense if both parents were working full-time.

Differing work arrangements by parents are related to more or less positive views of their children, and more or less intense feelings of day to day stress. Nothing, however, compares with being laid off, or wanting a job and not being able to find one. About 15 percent of the families in our sample included a worker without a job at one point or another during the three years that we were in touch with them. While this was not a large enough number of families to permit fancy statistical anlayses, our case studies indicate that being forced out of the workforce creates severe stresses, which vibrate through every aspect of family life. Loss of self-confidence, tension between husband and wife, withdrawal from relatives and friends, economic struggle--all these negative forces translate into a situation which can too easily become unbearable for one or more family members.

What are the policy implications of these findings? What we see so often in our data is a lack of fit between being a parent and working outside the home. Where a parent is able to arrange a pretty good fit, with the right part-time job or with a really good day care arrangment, that happy combination is reflected in the parent-child relationship. Most often, however, it is the family which stretches and twists to accomodate the ups

and downs of the economic climate, while industry and government are preoccupied with the profit margin and Reaganomics. Two parents working full-time and providing their own child care--that is stretching. A mother rushing unexpectedly into the labor force to pick up the economic slack when her husband is laid off--that, too, is family stretch. Families as puppet contortionists, dancing madly to the tune of an economy gone out of control.

If our data are any indication of the larger picture--and we believe they are--the workplace needs to do some bending. Systematic creation of part-time jobs--with decent fringe benefits--would be one useful step. And those jobs should be aimed at men as well as women. Then there is employer involvement with child care arrangments. I don't argue that worksites need necessarily provide child care for working parents, but get involved with the issues. Find out what arrangmenets your employees do make. Support your local child care council. Examine the possibility of day care subsidy as one possible fringe benefit. The payoffs are real. Secure parents are better workers. And the employer who shows interest and concern for the families of his employees is more likely to find them walking the extra mile for him when the going gets rough.

Another major source of influence in the lives of parents and children is what we call their social networks--the relatives, friends and neighbors who make a real difference in how we live our lives and raise our children. Family Matters parents were kind enough to discuss those relationshis with us, and from that information we constructed social maps for each of them. When we look at and compare those maps, we are interested in a number of things; the size of the networks, the activities going on with network members, whether the network is dominated by relatives or non-relatives, and whether the relationships are supportive or stressful.

You know, there is a myth about social support in this country, which has been with us for at least a century and is currently quite popular in some political circles. According to this myth there is really no need to provide community support to poor families because

they are so SOCIAL. Everyone in the ghetto is just one big happy extended family. Right? Wrong. Our data suggest that just the reverse is true. As family income decreases and parents receive less education, their networks become smaller and more constricted, including fewer non-relatives from the world beyond the extended family. Social networks cost money. It costs money to have a friend over to dinner, or drive a neighbor to work, or cover the emergency medical bills of a relative. And those are the activities which bind people together. Beyond that, the networks of poor parents contain more stress than those of the middle income, because the neighbors and relatives are often also poor, and therefore in need of support themselves. So those out there trying to pretend that there is some informal social safety net which is looking after the poor people during these hard economic times had better come done off their pedestals and get in touch with reality.

We wondered whether the types of social networks surrounding mothers made a difference in their feelings about themselves as parents, or their views of their children. With the mothers in two parent families, the picture turns out to be pretty straight forward. Mothers with lots of ties to non-relatives tended to feel most positively about themselves, especially in their parenting roles. The emotional support provided by these friends and neighbors was the key. It is almost as though you need people who you didn't grow up with to say you are OK before you can believe it. On the other hand, mothers' feelings about their children are most positively influenced by access to a goodly number of relatives, especially if they are willing to provide child-rearing advice. So our relatives have an investment in our children, which makes their advice special, and results in our feeling better about those children.

With single mothers the picture is much more complex. Why? First, because they are almost universally poor, and poverty doesn't lend itself to the maintenance of large and happy networks. Second, because there are single mothers in at least three major different types of social situations; living alone, living with their parents and living with an unmarried partner. Each of these situations means something different for social

relationships. Third, single mothers have less access to relatives. They are often out of touch with many of the relatives of the child's father (ex-inlaws), and may be disapproved of by some of their own kinfolk. So our results on the effects of network participation for single mothers are quite contradictory. Emotional support and advice, whether from relatives or non-relatives, are as likely to be stressful as they are to be helpful, both in terms of feelings about oneself and feelings about the child. The costs as well as the benefits of social relationships suddenly become apparent, especially in the absence of decent income and educational opportunity.

From a policy perspective our networks data have several implications, it seems to me. First, they clearly articulate the social costs of poverty. There is good reason to believe, for instance, that jobs and job training programs do more than simply to provide an economic future for parents; they can stimulate positive social supports which enhance feelings of self-worth, and produce in parents increasingly positive attitudes toward their children.

The second policy issue arising from our analyses of social networks pertains to the importance of non-relatives for parental attitudes toward themselves. It appears that friends from the neighborhood, or from work, or from the bowling league, or perhaps from school, have a special role to play in helping the parent develop a positive self-image. We believe, in turn, that this positive sense of self is a prerequisite for parental empowerment, a notion that I will return to shortly. Thus the opportunity to make friends is crucial for the young parent. At the workplace, managers and union representatives could foster such connections by organizing opportunities for parents to meet each other. Play-groups organized at the neighborhood level can serve the same function, as can groups and clusters organized by Head Start, or home health aides, or day care centers. These are community-building activities which have a multiplier effect, fostering more productive adults who in turn provide us with happier and more productive children.

I've talked so far about the workplace and social networks as sources of support and stress for young parents and their children. I shift now to the neighborhood as a context for childrearing. We gathered a good deal of data about the 18 Syracuse neighborhoods included in the study, from our interviews with parents, but in the 10 program neighborhoods we went one step futher, commissioning special observers to spend time documenting the physical details and social atmosphere of those areas. Three of the program neighborhoods consisted of predominantly low income families; the remaining seven, while not affluent, contained families of moderate and middle-income.

One of the most striking findings from our neighborhood analysis parallels the network results: the power of family income. By and large, families in the low-income areas described their neighborhoods as hostile or, at best, neutral. Those in the more middle income areas described their neighborhoods as neutral at worst, but more frequently as supportive for their children and their childrearing efforts. Space and safety are two dimensions which sharply distinguish the poor from the rest. Most of the seven middle-income areas appeared to have relatively safe nearby parks and playgrounds. Two of the three low-income neighborhoods had parks, but the parents felt they were too dangerous to use. They were described as dominated by teenagers who use drugs and strewn with broken glass. And these same families were much more likely to rent than own housing, so they lived in small apartments without yards suitable for children's play.

In the low-income areas, concern about the child's safety was usually accompanied by worries about the negative influences of other adults and children. As a result, the parents frequently restricted their children to the home and tried to limit their access to others. "Almost everyone here keeps their kids to themselves; they don't let their children play with other children, or at least they try to prevent it," reported one low-income mother. This is in sharp contrast to the attitudes of the families living in the middle-income areas, where, as one father put it, "I feel secure letting our kids have the run of the block

. . . People in the neighborhood know my daughter and her sister and they keep an eye on them."

The coping strategy used by families in the low-income neighborhoods seems to be withdrawal into the family to avoid an environment felt to be mostly hostile. "I keep to myself," one mother said, "they don't bother me and I don't bother them." This strategy is understandable, but carries with it burdens. Parents and children are forced together in confined space, cut off from any external support or stimulation, a situation ripe for frustration and despair.

Others who have studied neighborhoods conclude that they are "generally enabling or constraining, seldom vetoing or determining." We would agree with that observation. The policy question becomes, then, how can constraining forces be neutralized, and enabling ones mobilized? To begin with, parks are places where young families can meet and interact, for the mutual benefit of all concerned. <u>They must be kept clean and safe.</u> Furthermore, sceptical parents will need to be drawn back to those previously inaccessible parks by well-planned, family-oriented programs and the presence of well-trained supervisory staff. Images are badly tarnished, and they need serious attention. This attention is city business, combined with support and participation by neighborhood-based organizations.

A second policy priority at the neighborhood level involves finding ways to reduce the fear of others in the neighborhood which contributes so strongly to self-imposed isolation. Our neighborhood workers were in touch with 10-15 families in each of the low-income neighborhoods, most of whom viewed themselves as committed, caring people, and <u>few of whom even knew of the existance of the others</u>. Agencies and organizations serving families must begin to examine their responsibility to the social fabric of neighborhoods, and start finding ways to introduce families to each other in situations which are safe and supportive. Family-serving organizations need to band together in an effort to promote the kinds of contexts for caring at the neighborhod level which can break through the wall of fear and suspicion which isolates and alienates families in low resource areas.

The fourth environmental context of interest to us--along with the workplace, social networks and the neighborhood--is the schools, and more specifically the transition by the child from home to school. Here I shall be briefer, as most of our schools-related data were gathered quite recently and have yet to be analyzed. Let me make four quick points. First, we were struck from our earliest visits with the program families by how parents continue to view the school system as the means by which their children will become more than they themselves have been able to accomplish. The school is still seen as the means to fulfillment of the American Dream. When asked by our home visitors how they (the Family Matters workers) could be most useful to the family, many parents, especially in low resource areas, responded, "Get my child ready for school."

A second bit of data that I would like to remark upon underscores the remarkable diversity of educational programs experienced by the children in our study. Two-hundred and twenty-five children were involved with 163 teachers in 66 schools, some public and some private, some city and some suburban. Thus we have a rich range of viewpoints to sift through as we learn from both parents and teachers more about the home-school relationship.

A third note of interest, based on a fairly quick look at our recent interviews with parents, is how many of them look back on their own early school experiences with at least some degree of intimidation or unhappiness. These sentiments may make it difficult for them to take the initiative in establishing a working relationship with the teachers of their children.

Finally, we have already been finding very useful the responses by 163 Syracuse teachers to the following question: What is your concept of the ideal home-school relationship? The answers to the question were in general quite heartening, if you believe in the importance of a positive working relationship between parent and teacher. But there were also differences of opinion. Let me share with you two responses which illustrate those differences:

One teacher says, "I think the more communication you have between the home and school the more comfortable everyone will feel--the parents, teachers and children. They will all profit. It stands to reason the better you know somebody, the easier it is to work with them." But another teacher expresses these feelings, "Parents should reinforce and bolster my program. I am the professional. They need interest and they have to follow up. That's the problem. I send home all these notes and special messages and they are never followed up. I expect when I say something it will be done. Another thing--at our conferences so many parents come in ready to fight. They do not want to listen to me. They want to argue. They are not accepting of me as the teacher when they question, question, question all the time."

These data have been very helpful to us as we have been developing a series of home-school communications workshops for parents and teachers. I will come back to those workshops in a minute.

My colleague in this enterprise, Bill Cross, has been approaching our masses of data from a perspective which cross-cuts all of the issues that I have discussed so far. His interest is in how children, and especially Black children, go about developing a sense of identity, a sense of who they are. Bill points out that earlier attempts to answer this question have been severely limited both in method and in scope. These studies have paid virtually no attention to the environments surrounding children, but instead have relied on doll preference tests to measure identification with blackness or whiteness. Finding that Black children show preference for both black and white dolls, while white children limit preference to white dolls, the investigators in many of these earlier studies have concluded that Black children are exhibiting some sort of negative self-hated through their interest in whiteness.

Bill has been applying a much more ecological perspective to this question of identity formation, and is finding fascinating results. He has proposed that in order to understand the child's emerging sense of identity, you have to know who is presenting and interpretating

information to the child, and how they are going about that process. Here are some of his findings thus far:

1. First, the social networks of both white and black mothers are incredibly segregated. Fewer than 15 percent of the white mothers in our sample included even a single Black person in their networks. In the case of Black mothers there is somewhat more integration; more like a third of the mothers report at least one white member in the network. Realize, however, how simple this requirement should be to meet--you only need to include one opposite race contact.

2. Next Bill looked at the racial content of commonplace activities carried out by the parents with their children, including stories told, magazines available, music played, history of child's name and nickname, events recently attended, and TV shows watched. He found that content in Black homes was about 20 percent black and 80 percent white, while in the white homes it was about 4 percent black and 96 percent white.

3. Bill also had our interviewers pay a visit to each child's play and sleeping areas, to note the presence in the home of black and white dolls. Those data indicate that we were equally likely to find Black as white dolls in the Black homes, while in the white homes black dolls were found only 1 percent of the time.

Bill concludes from these data, and I agree with him, that Black children are learning about both the Black and the white worlds from a Black perspective, while white children are learning only about the white world. He feels that while these data have little to say about self esteem in either group of children, they certainly go a long way toward explaining the results of the earlier doll-preference tests. We also believe that in a multi-cultural society like ours, a multi-cultural world view is probably healthier than a perspective limited to a single racial group. In that sense the Black children in our sample were being launched on a healthier trajectory than were the white children.

Lessons Learned While Providing Supports to Young Families

So far what I have said has been based upon information gathered through interviews with parents and teachers. Most of those interviews were carried out several years ago, but a few of them are more recent. I have talked about the forces outside the household which come to bear on the family to affect how family members feel about each other and the activities they engage in together. At several points along the way I have pointed to what I feel are implications of these findings for local institutions and organizations, both private and public; industries, city departments, schools, churches, family-serving agencies and the like.

Now I would like to talk with you about a different kind of data. I mean what we have learned, not from interviewing people, but from spending three years trying to be useful to families through home visits and the organization of neighborhood clusters. The Family Matters Program, as we called it, began as a pretty general set of guidelines for our faithful workers, and evolved, with the help and patience of participating families, into a philosophy and an approach to the provision of support to families which we feel challenges the assumptions of traditional American social programming. It is that philosophy and approach which I want to make clear to you this morning.

Two concerns were uppermost in the minds of Urie Bronfenbrenner and myself as we set out to design a modest set of family supports for parents with pre-school-aged children. First, we were concerned about the dangers we see in what Urie refers to as "the unthinking exercise of massive technological power, and an unquestioning acquiescence to the demands of industrialization...", dangers which have the capacity to destroy our human ecology and which are manifested in a careless disregard for family life. Therefore, we are interested in all families, not just poor families, or minority families, or single parent families, or any other special cateogry of family, because technology and industrialization affect all families. Second, we were concerned that home visitors might be perceived of

by parents as "experts," coming into their homes to tell them how to raise their children. We wanted visits to be pick-me-ups, not put-me-downs.

Based upon these concerns, we designed a program which was made available to all types of families, and which was organized with the building of parental self esteem as its first priority. We tried it out with about 150 families over a three-year period, refining it as we went along. What we have ended up with is an approach which I am now calling parental empowerment. To empower means to enable, and so this is an enabling approach to family support. Designed to help parents help themselves, the approach concentrates first on helping parents appreciate the importance to the rest of their community, of their role as parents. We treat parents as experts, and encourage them to share their expertise. We believe, based on our evidence to date, that as parents begin to believe that they are important, they also see ways of acting and of accomplishing goals which had't occurred to them or they hand't had energy for before. So empowerment involved change in parents' attitudes and behavior based upon more positive perceptions of themselves.

This approach is in sharp contrast to that underlying most services to families in the United States, although it has much in common with a number of European approaches. The traditional American approach uses what Urie and I call the deficit model. With the deficit model you begin by offering services only to one category of families, and those families are singled out in the minds of the general populous. Then you make sure that the category you select has a "problem" or deficit associated with it; they are poor, or handicapped, or "minority." Then you set eligibility criteria based on that problem; I have to prove that I have a problem to get access to the service. Thus the perspective requires that one demonstrate inadequacy before becoming eligible for support. Empowerment vs. the deficit model. We think that we have found a better way, and we are spreading the word across the country. Just how the word is being spread I shall explain to you at the end of the presentation.

It is one thing to design a program of family suppport which differs markedly from the norm, and even to involve families in that development process. It is quite another thing to demonstrate that the program has positive impact on the families taking part in it. We have some preliminary indication that positive impacts have been felt, especially by families who were heavily involved, but the final verdict is not yet in. Analysis of the follow-up data needed to measure impact is just beginning this month, and must continue into next summer before impacts can be fully assessed. And, being human ecologists, we are equally aware of forces in the lives of families over which the program could have no control, which have been acting to lower living standards and the quality of life. Inflation, low productivity and high unemployment have combined to produce the worst economic climate since the end of the Great Depression, which means before many of us were born. Families with young children are especially vulnerable to economic downturns, because expenses are high and parents are just getting started in the labor market. So we are keeping our expectations for the visible impact of Family Matters very modest indeed.

The Impacts of National Policy

Another macro-level change took place in this country between our first interviews with parents and our return to them in 1981-82. I refer to the 1980 Presidential election, and the change in administrations at the national level. We wondered if effects of that change might have trickled down to our families in the year that had passed since the election, so we asked mothers the following question:

"As you know, there has been a Presidential election since we last interviewed you. Have changes in Washington had any effects upon you or your family?"

We started by analyzing mothers' responses in four categories; those who felt there had been no change as a result of the new administration, those who felt things had gotten better, those who said things had gotten worse, and those saying, "if, then," that is, "if things continue as is, then they will be worse." The overall results were as follows:

45% saw no change

3% felt things were better

39% felt things were worse

12% said "if continue as is, then worse"

Surprisingly, there was very little difference between the general responses of poor mothers and those in moderate or middle income families. Forty-two percent of low income mothers felt things were worse, while for those better off economically the number was 38 percent. When I looked at the reasons why mothers felt things had gotten worse, however, there were clear differences by income level. Low income parents talked about jobs and medical care. For example, one mother spoke for six or eight others when she said,

> It's harder now to get training for jobs, and to even find a job. Things are really bad. I really believe it's going to be really bad in the streets . . . with all those people out of jobs and stuff.

and another said,

> Yeah. I lost a job over it. But I don't want to talk about it. I can't even watch him on TV, he upsets me so much. I turn him off, just like he turned me off.

Speaking about medical care one mother put it this way,

> (There) is that dumb new medical card they've got. Every month . . . they have to take a picture of the card and change the number, and they make me feel like I don't have a right to it . . . Now I'm not a person anymore. It's like I'm trying ot cheat somebody or something. I don't feel like I'm in a free country.

Notice the way the change in policy affect's the woman's feeling about herself--"I'm not a person anymore."--a perfect example of the impact of the deficit model.

Mothers in families with more resources tended to speak about educational programs, high mortgage rates, nuclear issues and social security for their parents. For instance, one said,

> It's feels harder and harder for us to do the things with our kids that we would like to do, purely because you can't afford it even if we scrimp. We

> keep hoping with all the cuts in the social security system that our parents are going to be OK.

and another had this to say,

> The future could be very depressing. We've decided to become politically active again, and more visible in the peace movement, no-nukes and things like that, possibly to the point where it may jeopardize . . . the relationship we have with some of our friends. . .

It is interesting, when we looked at those who said things had gotten better, to see how careful they are to hedge their bets. One mother says,

> I'm a little happier that Reagan is president. Carter sat back and told us we'd just have to take it. At least Reagan is trying. He may fail, but at least he tried.

Another mother also draws the comparison with Jimmy Carter,

> All the kids like him, because when he talks on TV he talks so that everyone can understand. He doesn't talk down at you, like some people do. He doesn't talk above you like Jimmy Carter used to. Financially things are getting scary. I don't know if things are really going to get better. I think that Reagan has really tried, and I don't think it is working.

The Future of Family Matters

You might be interested in knowing that, although our parental empowerment program is finished in Syracuse, Family Matters is alive and flourishing at Cornell, and is actively involved across the state and across the country. Let me close my presentation by telling you a little bit about what we are now working on, and where things will go in the immediate future.

As many of you know, Cornell is the land grant unversity in New York State, and we reach out into every county and New York City with educational programs through the county Cooperative Extension associations. The state Head Start Regional Training Office is also at Cornell, serving the educational needs of Head Start and other pre-school programs throughout New York. We are hard at work developing educational workshops for adults which can be delivered through these networks, and which are aimed at affecting

local and state policy related to the four areas which I discussed earlier; parenting and the workplace, social networks, neighborhoods and the transition from home to school. For instance, we have a "Parent as Worker" module, consisting of a series of 1½ hour workshops for parents and others, which is designed to boost parents' self esteem, assist them in examining stresses associated with combining parenthood with work outside the home, and provide them with a chance to consider ways of relieving that stress. Topics covered include allocation of time, distribution of household tasks among family members, use of the social network, alternative child care arrangments, and consideration of options like part-time work and flextime. Practice in writing a resume, job seeking, and job interviews is also provided.

Aimed more directly at the enhancement of neighborhood life and network building is a series of thirteen 2½ hour workshops focused on parental empowerment through home visiting and cluster-building. Developed for workers in programs which are already using home visitors or are engaged in community organization, these workshops provide background in the concept of empowerment and the ecological perspective, the basic human relations skills needed to practice empowerment principles, and a set of speciific skills and information related to home visiting and the development and maintenance of neighborhood cluster groups.

Our approach to home-school communications is still more comprehensive. We have developed separate sets of workshops for parents and teachers, and also materials for school administrators. For parents, the emphasis is on skills like: how to pick a school, how to pick a teacher, parent-teacher conferencing, empathy with the teacher's role, school involvement options and how to read and use a report card. For teachers the workshops include exercises in understanding parental stress, empathy, values clarification, communication skills, skills related to conflict resolution, problem solving, and use of parents as resources.

We are also very excited about the Family Matters film, which will complement all of the workshop modules. This film is a moving portrayal of stresses and supports in the lives of two of "our" Syracuse families, with special emphasis on the world of work, neighborhod, social network and the schools their children attend. Produced in documentary form by filmmaker David Gluck, the film will be aimed at policy makers and parents alike.

All of these new Family Matters resources are now being pilot-tested in various sites upstate and in New York City. This effort will culminate next fall in a series of national, multi-state awareness workshops.

Well, that brings my update on Family Matters to a close. Let me end by giving thanks.

To the sponsors of this update:

The Mental Health Association of Onondaga County, and Fred Fusco;

Cooperative Extension, and Jerri Wilson;

The Onondaga County Child Care Council, and Phil Rose;

The Consortium of Children's Services, and Aidie Silvia.

To Urie Bronfenbrenner, who got things started in the first place, and Bill Cross.

To Frank Woolever of our staff, who has been a mainstay in so many ways.

To Mary Maples, who can truly find a needle in a haystack.

To our data collectors, our progam workers, and finally to the participating Syracuse families, without whom none of this could have been possible.

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PROJECT ABSTRACT

February, 1983

Title The Transition from Home to School for Children and their Families.

(Previously known as The Comparative Ecology of Human Development)

Contractor:	Principal Investigator	NIE Project Officer
Cornell University Ithaca, New York 14853 (607) 256-4571	Professor Moncrieff Cochran Department of Human Development and Family Studies	Oliver Moles (202)254-5407

Contract No.	Duration of Award	Funding to date
NIE 400-76-0150	9/27/76- 9/26/83	$820,862

Abstract:

This is a longitudinal and experimental study of social contexts as they affect children and families during the period of transition from home to school. Actual life settings (e.g. family, social networks, school work, agency contacts) are being analyzed as they affect the activities of parents and thereby the development of the child's intellectual and social competence. This work builds on a 1978 baseline assessment of ethnically and socio-economically diverse families with 3-4 year olds. The primary interest is in the capacity of formal and informal social relationships to serve as support systems to parents.

Two Hundred Thirty families in 18 urban and suburban neighborhoods in Syracuse, N.Y. are participating in the study. Ten randomly selected neighborhoods have had support programs around parent-child relationships and/or common concerns of families during the two years before children entered first grade. One emphasis has been on ways of enhancing home school relations. A main priority of the analysis will be the effects of these support programs on children's school performance. Because the programs provides parents options and resources rather than serving as an advocate, and recognize the strengths in all families, they represent a promising new way of empowering families.

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